

Department, Clothing, and Accessory Stores

(SIC 53 and 56)

SIGNIFICANT POINTS

- The industry offers many part-time jobs.
- The total number of wage and salary jobs is projected to increase more slowly than average, but high job turnover will produce a large number of job openings.

Nature of the Industry

Department, clothing, and accessory stores are located throughout the country. Department stores generally carry apparel; home furnishings, such as furniture, floor coverings, curtains, draperies, linens, and major household appliances; and housewares, such as table and kitchen appliances, dishes, and utensils. Different types of merchandise are normally arranged in separate sections or departments under a single management. Department stores commonly provide their own charge accounts, deliver merchandise, and usually have 50 or more employees.

Discount and variety stores carry a wide variety of merchandise, from lawn rakes to dinnerware to motor oil. They emphasize self-service and low prices, and have grown rapidly in recent years, taking much business away from other department, clothing, and accessory stores. Warehouse clubs—which carry a more limited variety of merchandise than department stores, often in bulk quantities—are also included in this industry.

Clothing and accessory stores specialize in men's, women's, or children's clothing and related products, such as ties and shoes. Furriers and custom tailors carrying stocks of materials are also included in this industry. In contrast to department stores, clothing and accessory stores usually are much smaller, may concentrate on a limited type or style of clothing, and employ fewer workers.

Working Conditions

Most employees in department, clothing, and accessory stores work under clean, well-lighted conditions. Many jobs are part time, and employees are on duty during peak selling hours, including nights, weekends, and holidays. Because weekends are busy days in retailing, almost all employees work at least one of these days and have a week-day off. During busy periods, such as Christmas and back-to-school time, longer than normal hours may be scheduled, and the use of vacation time is limited. Buyers and managers may work more than their scheduled 40 hours per week.

Retail salespersons and cashiers often stand for long periods, and stock clerks may perform strenuous tasks such as moving heavy, cumbersome boxes.

The incidence of work-related illnesses and injuries varied greatly among segments of the industry. Workers in general merchandise and apparel and accessory stores had 9.2 and 3.6 cases of injury and illness per 100 full-time workers, respectively, in 1997, compared with an average of 7.1 throughout private industry.

Employment

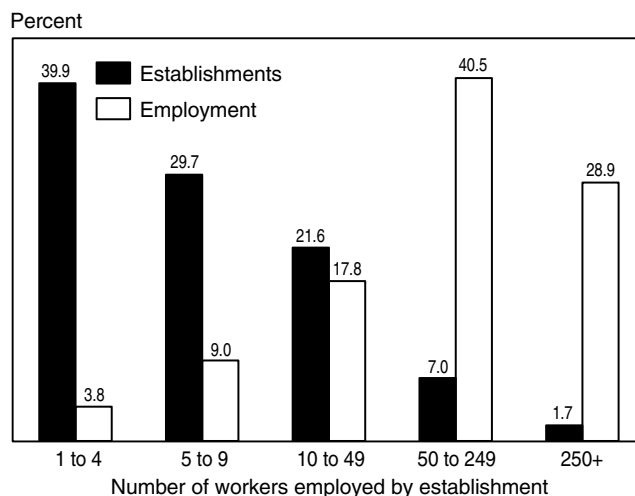
Department, clothing, and accessory stores had about 3.9 million wage and salary jobs in 1998, making them one of the largest employers in the Nation. Department stores accounted for slightly over half of all jobs in the industry, but only about 7 percent of establishments. In 1997, about two-thirds of workers were employed in department, clothing, and accessory stores with more than 50 workers (chart). An estimated 88,000 self-employed also worked in this industry. In contrast to many industries, this industry employs workers in all sections of the country, from the largest cities to all but the smallest towns.

Many of the industry's workers are young—over 33 percent were under 25 years old in 1998, compared with 15 percent for all industries. More than 34 percent of the workers were employed part time.

Occupations in the Industry

Marketing and sales occupations made up almost two-thirds of workers in the industry in 1998 (table 1). *Retail salespersons*, who comprised 42 percent of employment in this industry, help customers select and purchase merchandise. A salesperson's primary job is to interest customers in the merchandise and to answer any questions customers may have. In order to do this, they may describe the product's various

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Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, *County Business Patterns*, 1997

models, styles, and colors, or demonstrate its use. To sell expensive and complex items, an in-depth knowledge of the products is needed.

In addition to selling, most retail salespersons electronically register the sale on a cash register or terminal, receive cash, checks, and charge payments; and give change and receipts. Depending on the hours they work, they may “open” or “close” their cash registers or terminals. This may include counting the money in the cash register; separating charge slips, coupons, and exchange vouchers; and making deposits at the cash office. Salespersons often are held responsible for the contents of their register, and repeated shortages are cause for dismissal in almost all stores.

Salespersons also may handle returns and exchanges of merchandise, wrap gifts, and keep their work areas neat. In addition, they may help stock shelves or racks, arrange for mailing or delivery of a purchase, mark price tags, take inventory, and prepare displays. They also must be familiar with the store’s security practices to help prevent theft of merchandise. *Cashiers* total bills, receive money, make change, fill out charge forms, and give receipts. Retail salespersons and cashiers often have similar duties.

Administrative support occupations make up the next largest group of employees, with about 19 percent of total employment in the industry. *Stock clerks* bring merchandise to the sales floor and stock shelves and racks. They may also mark items with identifying codes or prices so they can be recognized quickly and easily, although many items today arrive pre-ticketed. *Adjustment clerks* investigate and resolve customers’ complaints about merchandise, service, billing, or credit ratings. Sometimes they are called customer service representatives or customer complaint clerks. The industry also employs administrative occupations found in most industries, such as general office clerks and bookkeepers.

Executive, administrative, and managerial occupations comprised 5 percent of industry employment. *Department managers* oversee sales workers in a department or section of the store. They set the work schedule, supervise employee performance, and are responsible for the overall sales and profitability of their departments.

Buyers purchase merchandise for resale from wholesalers or manufacturers. Using historical records, market analysis, and their sense of consumer demand, they buy merchandise with the best style, quality, selection, and price. Wrong decisions mean that the store will mark down slow selling merchandise that may have to be sold below cost, causing lost profits. Buyers for larger stores or chains usually buy one classification of merchandise, such as casual menswear or home furnishings; for smaller stores they may buy all the merchandise sold in the store. They also plan and implement sales promotion plans for their merchandise, such as arranging for advertising and ensuring that the merchandise is displayed properly.

Merchandise managers are in charge of a group of buyers and department managers; they plan and supervise the purchase and marketing of merchandise in a broad area, such as women’s apparel or appliances. In department store chains, which have many stores, much of the buying and merchandising functions are centralized in one location. Some local managers might decide which merchandise, among that bought centrally, would be best for their own stores. *Department store managers* direct and coordinate the activities in these stores. They may set pricing policies to

maintain profitability and notify senior management of concerns or problems. Department store managers usually supervise department managers directly, and indirectly oversee other department store workers.

Because they may be the only manager in smaller stores, *clothing and accessory store managers* combine many of the duties of department managers, department store managers, and buyers. *Retail chain store area supervisors* oversee the activities of clothing and accessory store managers in an area. They hire managers, insure that company policies are carried out, and coordinate sales and promotional activities.

Various other store level occupations in this diversified industry include *interior designers, hairdressers, laborers, food service workers, and security personnel*.

Table 1. Employment of wage and salary workers in department, clothing, and accessory stores by occupation, 1998 and projected change, 1998-2008

(Employment in thousands)

Occupation	1998		1998-2008 Percent change
	Employment Number	Percent	
All occupations	3,872	100.0	5.9
Marketing and sales	2,528	65.3	7.9
Salespersons, retail	1,641	42.4	6.6
Cashiers	502	13.0	13.8
Marketing and sales worker supervisors	272	7.0	8.6
Administrative support, including clerical	752	19.4	1.6
Stock clerks and order fillers	331	8.6	4.2
Shipping, receiving and traffic clerks	123	3.2	7.6
Records processing occupations	69	1.8	-14.2
General office clerks	64	1.6	7.8
Adjusters, investigators, and collectors	40	1.0	10.7
Executive, administrative, and managerial	183	4.7	-.3
General managers and top executives	97	2.5	1.1
Management support occupations	30	0.8	0.0
Service	152	3.9	-.4
Food preparation and service occupations	39	1.0	-7.2
Protective service occupations ...	34	0.9	1.9
Hairdressers, hairstylists, and cosmetologists	33	0.9	8.0
Precision production, craft, and repair	94	2.4	7.8
Mechanics, installers, and repairers	59	1.5	14.8
Operators, fabricators, and laborers	113	2.9	2.8
Helpers, laborers, and material movers, hand	79	2.0	-2.9
Professional specialty	39	1.0	14.8
All other occupations	12	0.3	33.5

Training and Advancement

There are no formal educational requirements for most sales and administrative support jobs; in fact, many people get their

first jobs in this industry. A high school education is preferred, especially by larger employers.

Salespersons should enjoy working with people. Among other desirable characteristics are a pleasant personality, a neat appearance, and the ability to communicate clearly. Because of the trend to provide more service, it is becoming increasingly important for salespersons to be knowledgeable about the products and merchandise available. Some employers may conduct a background check—especially for those employees selling high-priced items.

In most small stores, an experienced employee or the manager instructs newly hired sales personnel in making out sales checks and operating the cash register. In larger stores, training programs are more formal and are usually conducted over several days. Some stores conduct periodic training seminars to refresh and improve the customer service and selling skills of their sales workers. Initially, trainees are taught how to make cash, check, and charge sales and eventually are instructed on returns and special orders. Other topics usually included are customer service, security, and store policies and procedures. Depending on the type of product they are selling, they may be given specialized training in their area. For example, those working in cosmetic sales receive instruction on the types of products available and for whom they would be most beneficial.

Some salespersons are hired for a particular department, others are placed after they have completed training. Placement is usually based on where positions are available. There are some salespersons, often called “floaters,” who are not assigned to a particular department; instead, they work where needed.

Advancement opportunities for salespersons vary. As those who work full time gain experience and seniority, they usually move to positions of greater responsibility or to positions with potentially higher commissions. Salespersons who are paid on a commission basis—that is, they earn a percentage of the value of what they sell—may advance to selling more expensive items. The most experienced—and highest paid—salespersons sell big-ticket items. This work requires the most knowledge of the product and the greatest talent for persuasion. In some establishments, advancement opportunities are limited because one person, often the owner, is the only manager, but sales experience may be useful in finding a higher level job elsewhere. Retail selling experience is an asset when applying for sales positions with larger retailers or in other kinds of sales, such as motor vehicle, financial services, or wholesale sales.

Traditionally, capable salespersons with good leadership skills, yet without a college degree, could advance to management positions; however, a college education is becoming increasingly important for managerial positions such as department manager, store manager, or buyer. Computer skills are extremely important in all parts of the industry, especially in areas such as inventory control, human resources, sales forecasting, and electronic commerce. Many retailers prefer to hire persons with associate or bachelor’s degrees in marketing, merchandising, or business as management trainees or assistant managers. Despite this trend, capable employees without a college degree may still be able to advance to administrative or supervisory work.

Earnings

Hourly earnings of nonsupervisory workers in department, clothing, and accessory stores are well below the average for all workers in private industry. This reflects both the high proportion of part-time and less experienced workers in these stores, and the fact that even experienced workers receive relatively low pay compared with experienced workers in many other industries (table 2). Earnings in selected occupations in department, clothing, and accessory stores appear in table 3.

Table 2. Average weekly and hourly earnings of nonsupervisory workers in department, clothing, and accessory stores, 1998

Industry segment	Weekly	Hourly
All industries	\$442	\$12.77
General merchandise stores	256	8.59
Department stores	259	8.65
Variety stores	214	7.74
Miscellaneous general merchandise stores	253	8.35
Apparel and accessory stores	226	8.45
Men's and boys' clothing stores	292	10.25
Women's clothing stores	203	8.35
Family clothing stores	227	8.22
Shoe stores	219	8.23

Many employers permit workers to buy merchandise at a discount. Smaller stores usually offer limited employee benefits. In larger stores, benefits are more comparable to those offered by employers in other industries and can include vacation and sick leave, health and life insurance, profit sharing, and pension plans.

Unionization in this industry is limited. Only 3.9 percent of workers were union members or were covered by union contracts, compared with 15.4 percent in all industries.

Table 3. Median hourly earnings of the largest occupations in department, clothing, and accessory stores, 1997

Occupation	General merchandise stores	Apparel and accessory stores	All industries
General managers and top executives	\$23.01	\$15.27	\$26.05
First-line supervisors and managers/supervisors-sales and related workers ...	10.21	10.76	13.43
General office clerks	8.34	8.05	9.10
Stock clerks-stockroom, warehouse or storage yard ...	7.48	7.00	8.85
Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks	7.34	7.72	10.29
Janitors and cleaners, except maids and housekeeping cleaners	7.05	6.36	7.44
Salespersons, retail	6.82	6.33	7.23
Stock clerks, sales floor	6.67	6.31	6.93
Cashiers	6.48	6.29	6.22
Hairdressers, hairstylists, and cosmetologists	5.60	—	7.23

Outlook

Overall, wage and salary jobs in department, apparel, and accessory stores are projected to increase 6 percent over the 1998-2008 period, slower than the average for all industries combined. Slower than average growth is mainly due to the decline in jobs in clothing and accessory store establishments, which itself arises from the increasing popularity among consumers of discount stores and “mega-retailers.” Besides stressing low prices, these types of stores also stress self-service, meaning they tend to be less labor-intensive than the traditional retailers. The number of jobs in the department store industry is expected to increase about as fast as the average.

There will continue to be keen competition among retailers, meaning that new stores will continually open and others will close. Alternative retail outlets, such as mail order companies, home shopping, and electronic commerce have carved a niche for themselves in the market, and have taken away customers who usually shop at traditional retail stores. Even large, well-established department stores are subject to mergers, acquisitions, and sometimes bankruptcy. Many retailers are beginning to provide their products through catalogues and the Internet to remain competitive. Some companies are moving towards obtaining goods directly from the manufacturer, bypassing the wholesale level completely, reducing costs, and increasing profits.

Worker productivity is increasing because of technological advances, particularly among clerks, managers, and buyers. For example, computerized systems allow companies to streamline purchasing and reduce the need for buyers. However, because direct customer contact will also remain important, employment of sales workers who interact personally with customers will be less affected by technological advances.

Despite the overall decline in the number of jobs, a large numbers of job openings will result from high job turnover in this large industry. Jobs will be available for young workers, first-time job seekers, persons with limited job experience, senior citizens, and people seeking part-time work, such as those with young children or those who wish to supplement their income from other jobs.

Persons with a college degree or computer skills will be highly sought after for managerial positions in areas such as human resources, data management, logistics, management information systems, and finance.

Sources of Additional Information

General information on careers in retail establishments is available from:

- National Retail Federation, 325 7th St. NW., Suite 1100, Washington, DC 20004. Internet: <http://www.nrf.com>
- International Council of Shopping Centers, 665 5th Ave, New York, NY 10022. Internet: <http://www.icsc.org>
- Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union, 30 East 29th St., 4th floor, New York NY 10016.

Information on these occupations may be found in the 2000-01 *Occupational Outlook Handbook*:

- Advertising, marketing, and public relations managers
- Cashiers
- Designers
- Private detectives and investigators
- Purchasing managers, buyers, and purchasing agents
- Retail salespersons
- Retail sales worker supervisors and managers
- Stock clerks